

## Salisbury Cathedral Christian Aid Week May 10<sup>th</sup> 2020

*David Pain*

*Psalm 31 & John 14:1-14*

‘DO not let your hearts be troubled...’ Jesus says: ‘I am the way, the truth and the life.’

For 75 years CA Week has been an opportunity for churches to witness to what it means to be followers of Christ in a world divided by poverty. We invite our neighbours to stand in solidarity with and give to their global neighbours.

This year CA Week is different, but the fundamental truth of the Week remains unchanged: in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic we are united as one human family, separated- broken apart, but together. IN the brokenness of poverty and exclusion we find our common life, our shared humanity.

Thank you for the invitation to join the Cathedral Christian Aid Week service this year. I have been involved with Christian Aid since childhood. I went with my parents - hands full of red envelopes- to invite our neighbours to be part of something extraordinary. My children did the same with me.

I was privileged to work for CA for 20 years, including seven as head of the Africa programme and seven as director of the UK department working in communications, campaigns and fundraising.

Christian Aid is a partnership of people, churches and local organisations committed to ending poverty worldwide.

A couple of years ago I met Emmanuel. Emmanuel Hena was sitting under the partial shade of a thorn tree. Emmanuel was a Christian Aid volunteer helping organise the distribution of food, Northern Nigeria.

Today the camp where he lives is the frontline of Christian Aids response to coronavirus which threatens the lives of the most vulnerable people in the world- most especially in refugee camps.

In Nigeria alone CA, with your support, is involved in feeding 50 000 people this week, among the 2m being reached this year by CA humanitarian programmes worldwide.

Christian Aid learnt a great deal from the Ebola crisis in West Africa- especially about the important role of faith leaders in communities, helping people to reduce infection.

Today, CA around the world is part of the effort to help people manage this new virus, especially in overcrowded refugee camps and in the many places where there are inadequate healthcare systems.

Emmanuel was an engineering student; he had fled conflict to the safety of a camp.

When I asked him why he was volunteering, he told me: ‘I am passionate about helping people in need’. He was one of 100 people in his community who volunteered to help – they knew the community and were trusted to organise the distribution of food.

Christian Aid always works through local organisations because they are best placed to understand people's real needs and are accountable to people locally.

Being there I felt a mixture of the stress of what it must be like to live in such conditions, not least in temperatures of 45 degrees, mixed with great respect of the resilience and humanity of the people I met like Emmanuel.

How apt that his name was Emmanuel- 'God with us'. Love in action.

Right now like our sisters and brothers around the world we are fearful, we do not know the future. And we are invited this week to dwell in the presence of a loving God, to follow Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life.

In the Psalm we hear the cry: 'In you O Lord I seek refuge... rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.'

Like the Psalmist, we and the whole world long for security at this time of uncertainty and fear. We know that this virus has already claimed many lives and it will continue to be a moment at which many lives will end- those of our loved ones, our neighbours, nearby and globally, even of ourselves.

It is into the hands of a loving God that we entrust ourselves.

Love never fails; coronavirus impacts all of us. But love unites us all.

In our gospel reading we hear words of comfort- v1 'do not let your hearts be troubled'. IN a time of great confusion for the disciples, Thomas is honest about his fears and doubts: 'how can we know the way?' he asks in v5. Jesus's words of response echo through the centuries, as relevant today as they were to those first disciples- 'I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me' in v6.

We are invited to follow the way of life, to dwell in the Fathers presence. We are also invited, like the first disciples to recognise that the journey of discipleship is a journey through brokenness.

Poverty is the result of many causes- political, economic, social. Conflict among the powerful often leaves the poorest and most marginalised displaced and insecure. As a diocese, we travel in partnership with the people of Sudan and South Sudan whose lives have been marred by conflict.

Like South Sudan, Colombia in Latin America is a country which has been torn apart by decades of conflict. This CA Week I am reminded of a visit I made there.

I went to Colombia to visit a rural community in Meta Province, a day's drive south of Bogota. We were the guests of a community which had been destroyed, displaced, torn apart and scattered by civil war over many years.

Many villagers had lost their lives in the violence of the displacement. Thanks to the support of CA partner the Inter-church Commission for Justice and Peace, the remnant of the community have returned to their lands and secured them as a weapons-free humanitarian zone.

In the middle of the day, in a simple tin roofed shack we shared the Eucharist. Our priest brought out a large clay pot. It contained the broken fragments of a similar pot. These he removed and laid on the ground.

He explained that the shards had all once formed another complete pot, on which were written the names of the communities that had been fragmented, displaced, and scattered. At an earlier gathering community representatives had written these on the pot as an act of solidarity. Then signifying the trauma and anguish of the conflict they had shattered it.

Now, at the heart of the Eucharist, one by one, members of the broken communities stepped forward, took a shard, spoke the name of their community and placed it in the intact pot.

Piece by piece, amid prayer and recollection, the communities came back together.

Jesus says: 'I am the way, the truth and the life'.

It was in the broken bread that the first disciples recognised the risen Jesus on the Road to Emmaus.

We are invited to enter the reality of brokenness, and to gather the shards of splintered communities. In the midst of brokenness and fear, whether through conflict or the separation of the corona virus pandemic we recognise, this week of all weeks, globally and locally, we are one body.

Christian Aid Week is an opportunity to express our unity in the midst of brokenness, it is an opportunity to gather the fragments of lives divided by poverty, by fear, by conflict, by ill health.

We give to the work of CA this week as a symbol of our shared commitment to the one global family to which we all belong. We may not be able to distribute and collect red CA Week envelopes this year, but we can give online, we can pass on the e-envelope from the CA website.

We are *still* invited to be part of something extraordinary, united as one human family as never before.

Amen.